
Title: The Role of Gender Relations in Household Nutrition

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Background: Save the Children leads the implementation of ENGINE – USAID’s flagship integrated nutrition project which aims to improve the nutritional status of women and children less than 5 years of age through sustainable, coordinated and evidence-based interventions in four regions (Amhara, Oromia, SNNP and Tigray) of Ethiopia. ENGINE’s innovative interventions, including a robust learning agenda, support and guide effective national nutrition policy and practices to reduce under-nutrition. In partnering with the Government of Ethiopia to revise the National Nutrition Program (NNP), ENGINE identified an evidence gap in the critical relationship between gender and nutrition. To address this research need and contribute to the gender component of the revised NNP, ENGINE conducted a gender analysis, which will have significant policy and programmatic implications.

Methods: The gender analysis was designed to assess the role of gender relations in household nutrition. A community-based cross-sectional study design with mixed methods of quantitative and qualitative data collection was conducted from January to February 2013. A multistage sampling technique was used to randomly select 12 woredas (from four ENGINE regions) and systematic random sampling was used to select 470 study subjects (both men and women). A structured household survey questionnaire was used to collect the quantitative data. Qualitative data was collected using key informant interviews and focus group discussions with agriculture and health workers, opinion leaders and community members (men and women). Data was analyzed using SPSS statistical software for the quantitative data and thematic analysis was used for the qualitative data analysis.

Results: Overall, women spent an average of 13 hours a day working and nearly 50% of women spent more than six hours on food preparation. More than 50% of the study participants claimed that women were passive participants in community structures while only 5% were able to make decisions. Although women had control over dairy products and poultry, the men controlled the majority of the resources (land, livestock and agricultural inputs). Nearly a third of women (32.8%) had no access to media compared to 17.4% of men. Only 13.2% of women and 23% of men had frequent access to nutrition information through radio and television.

Implications for policy and program: When developing national nutrition policy, gender issues need to be fully addressed and integrated into nutrition programs such as involving men, targeting interventions that are controlled by women, empowering women to take an active role in community structures and improving women’s access to nutrition information.